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ABSTRACT

The first round of a study of what happens to students after they leave Peel County (Ontario) secondary schools includes data from students who were in grade 11 in 1977-78 and 1979-80. A 10 percent sample (approximately 750 students in each group) was drawn from school records. Of these, 1,072 people (75 percent) were interviewed by telephone. Major findings of the study are as follows: (1) most former students are in the labor force, most in entry-level jobs; (2) few students enter formal job training programs; (3) the university is the postsecondary institution most frequently attended; (4) respondents' current activities are frequently not what they expected when in grade 11, especially so for those in the labor force; and (5) vocational students are less likely than other students to be at school and more likely to have had vague plans when in grade 11. The report describes the methodology with text and tables used to analyze the responses. A short discussion paper follows the official report and suggests changes in a variety of school practices. (MLF)

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A REPORT OF THE

RESEARCH UNIT

PEEL BOARD OF EDUCATION

THE PEEL SECONDARY FOLLOWUP STUDY: FIRST BIENNIAL REPORT

January, 1983 0283

Benjamin Levin, PH.D
Chief Research Officer

Program Committee
1983 01 17

THE PEEL BOARD OF EDUCATION

PEEL SECONDARY FOLLOW-UP STUDY

RECOMMENDATION:

That this report be received for information.

Prepared by: B. Levin

Submitted by: F. J. Hughes

REPORT SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report contains the results of the first round of the Peel Secondary Follow-up Study, in which more than 1000 former Peel secondary students were interviewed regarding their current work and educational activities.

Major findings of the study are

1. That in four years or less after grade 11 most former students are in the labour force.

2. That most of those in the labour force are in entry-level jobs.

3. That few students enter formal job training programs.

4. That university is the post-secondary institution most frequently attended.

5. That respondents current activities are frequently not what they expected when in grade 11. This is especially so for those in the labour force.

6. That vocational students are less likely than other students to be at school, more likely to be unemployed, and more likely to have had vague plans when in grade 11.

These results suggest that students plans when in high school are often vague, unrealistic, and subject to considerable change. Results from the next round of the study (1983-84) will provide further information on these points.

Recommendation:

That this report be received for information.

The results of the study will be widely disseminated, within Peel and elsewhere. Comments and suggestions regarding implications of the report will be requested, and these will be monitored by the Superintendent of Program to ensure that any appropriate recommendations are brought forward.

THE PEEL SECONDARY FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Introduction

The Peel Secondary Follow-up Study is an ongoing study of Peel students after they leave our secondary schools. Samples of grade 11 students are selected every two years, and each sample is contacted every two years for 10 years.

The Study grew out of the report by W. J. Lambie and R. N. Chalmers entitled "A Regional Student Evaluation Policy for Peel". This report, approved by the Program Committee in January, 1981, contained the following recommendation:

> the Chief Research Officer, under the supervision of the Superintendent of Program, develop a proposal for tracing the academic and/or employment history of a random sample of Peel students, reporting each year (for five years) in the Fall on the results".

A proposal for such a study was subsequently developed and approved by the Board at its meeting on June 9, 1981.

This report covers the first round of the study, with students who were in grade 11 three years ago and five years ago. The next round of the study will be reported in the fall of 1984.

Purpose

The Secondary Education Review Project (SERP) of the Province of Ontario crystallized a number of concerns about secondary school programs in Ontario. There is particular interest in the extent to which secondary school programs are matched to and take account of the educational and economic opportunities which are actually open to students when they leave high school. Yet there is little information, either in Peel or elsewhere in Ontario, on this issue. Specifically, we do not know what proportion of our students go on to further education, what kinds of jobs former students get, and how these activities relate to their high school experience and expectations.

This first round of the study addresses the following questions:

1. What do students do, in terms of education or employment, after they leave secondary school?

2. How are these activities related to their high school expectations?

The results will have implications for curriculum development, program planning, counselling services, and other aspects of secondary school program. Later rounds of the study may be able to address other aspects of students' post-secondary activities.

The study was designed to provide data on the post high school activities of Peel students. In order to enhance participation rates, only a small number of questions were to be asked in the first round. It was decided during the planning of the study that data would be aggregated for the region as a whole, and that results for individual secondary schools would be available only to those schools. However, vocational school students who attend distinct schools, were therefore categorized separately.

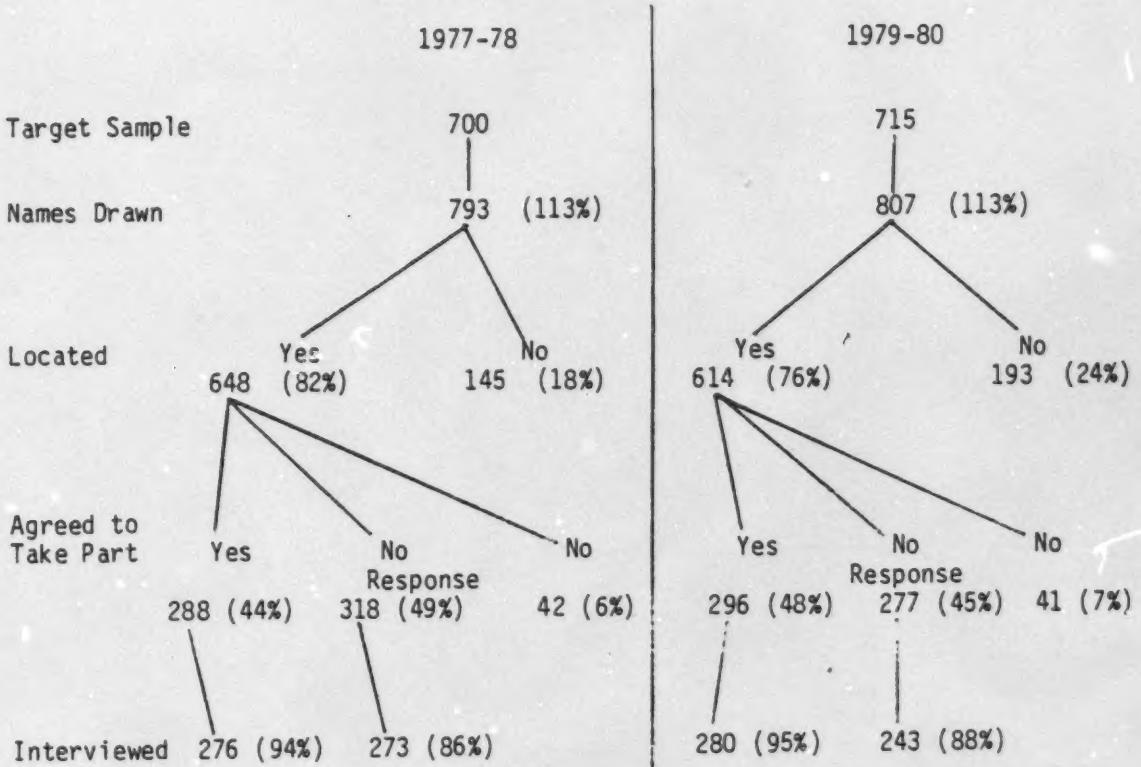
Method

The intention of the study is to identify a 10% sample of grade 11 students every second year, and to follow each group for ten years. When in full operation, there will be five groups (called "cohorts") of students being surveyed, ranging from 2 to 10 years after their grade 11 year. Using grade 11 as the base year means that the study will include students who do not graduate. Had an earlier year been chosen - such as grade 10 - the problems of keeping track of students between their selection and their leaving school would have been unduly complicated. Thus grade 11 was seen as a reasonable compromise year for sampling purposes.

The first groups of students included in the study were those in grade 11 in 1977-78 and 1979-80. A 10% sample of these students was chosen from school records on a random basis. Efforts were then made to locate and interview all the students in each sample. This proved to be a time-consuming and difficult task, as large numbers of students and their families had moved since their grade 11 year. Nonetheless, a very high percentage of those sampled have been located and interviewed, and efforts are continuing to locate and interview the remainder of each group. Figure 1 provides data on the number of students sampled, located, and interviewed. It is expected that more than 90% of the original samples will eventually take part in the study. In future, students will be contacted while still in grade 11, reducing the time required to locate them.

FIGURE 1

RESPONSE RATES



Interviewed or Refused as a Percent of:		
Located	91%	92%
Target	84%	79%
Names Drawn	75%	70%

Each student was asked first of all about his or her "major current activity" - attending school, working, job training, and so on. Participants were then asked to specify what job or course they were engaged in, as the case might be, and how long they had been there. The participants were then asked whether they were also engaged in a second activity - for example, part time schooling or work. Finally, respondents were asked how their current activity compared with their grade 11 intentions.

The interviews were conducted by telephone. Given the small number of questions, and their relatively non-controversial character, it was felt that telephone interviewing would produce a higher response rate. All those in the sample who did not specifically indicate their refusal to take part were phoned. Respondents were also asked to provide information - such as parents' address and occupation - to help locate them should they move in the next two years. As indicated in Figure 1, very few former students chose not to participate in the study. Many respondents expressed considerable interest in the study, and voluntarily provided additional information about their experiences and attitudes to high school.

Workers

Figure 2 shows the proportion of students in each cohort who were in the labour force (i.e. working or unemployed), at school, or in some other situation at the time of the interview.

FIGURE 2

PRIMARY ACTIVITY OF RESPONDENTS

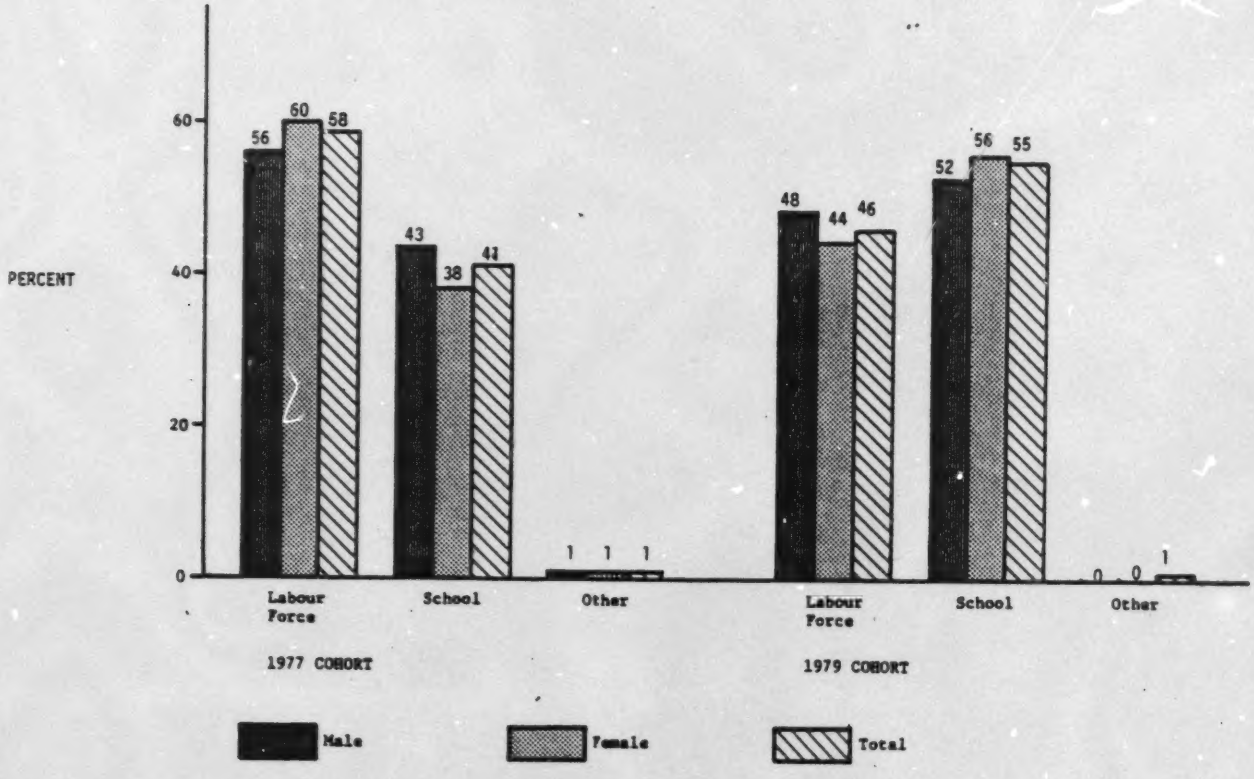


Figure 3 shows the breakdown of respondents who are in the labour force.

FIGURE 3

STATUS OF RESPONDENTS IN THE LABOURFORCE

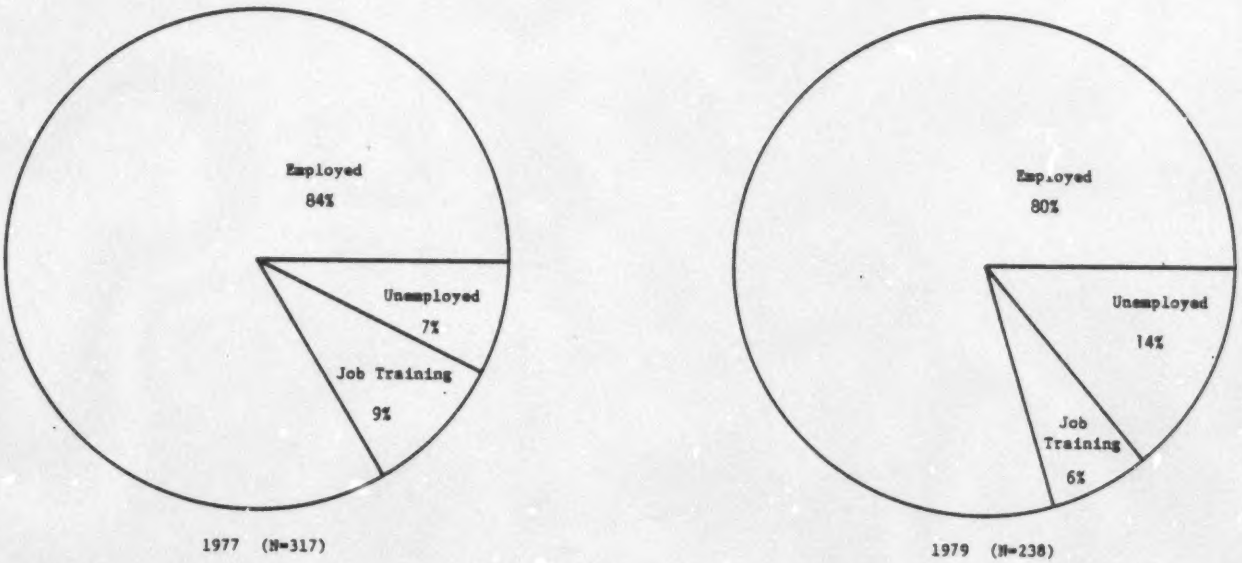


Table 1 provides further information on the occupations of the former students. The Table shows that most respondents are in the entry-level jobs, such as clerical, labour, or sales. While these three categories account for 55% of the 1977 cohort in the labour force, and 47% of the 1979 cohort, they comprise only 38% of the Ontario labour force as a whole. Not surprisingly, there are very few former students in professional or managerial categories.

TABLE 1

OCCUPATIONS OF RESPONDENTS

	Clerical	Sales	Service	Production	Labour	Mechanical	Other
1977-78 (N=305)	33%	12%	10%	8%	6%	6%	25%
1979-80 (N=231)	22%	16%	9%	12%	10%	4%	27%

Examples of the types of jobs under these categories are:

Clerical - secretary, accounts payable clerk, bank teller, order desk clerk.
Sales - cashier, salesperson, pricing department.
Service - bartender, travel agent, waiter, security officer, police cadet.
Production - assembly operator, equipment operator, machine operator.
Labour - air conditioning helper, gas attendant, parks maintenance.
Mechanical - diesel mechanics, plumbers, refrigeration apprentice, telephone maintenance.

The use of broad categories should not, however, obscure the very great range of actual jobs being held by former students. These range across the entire gamut of occupations in the economy, including all of the major census occupational categories.

Table 2 indicates the length of time respondents report working for their current employers.

TABLE 2

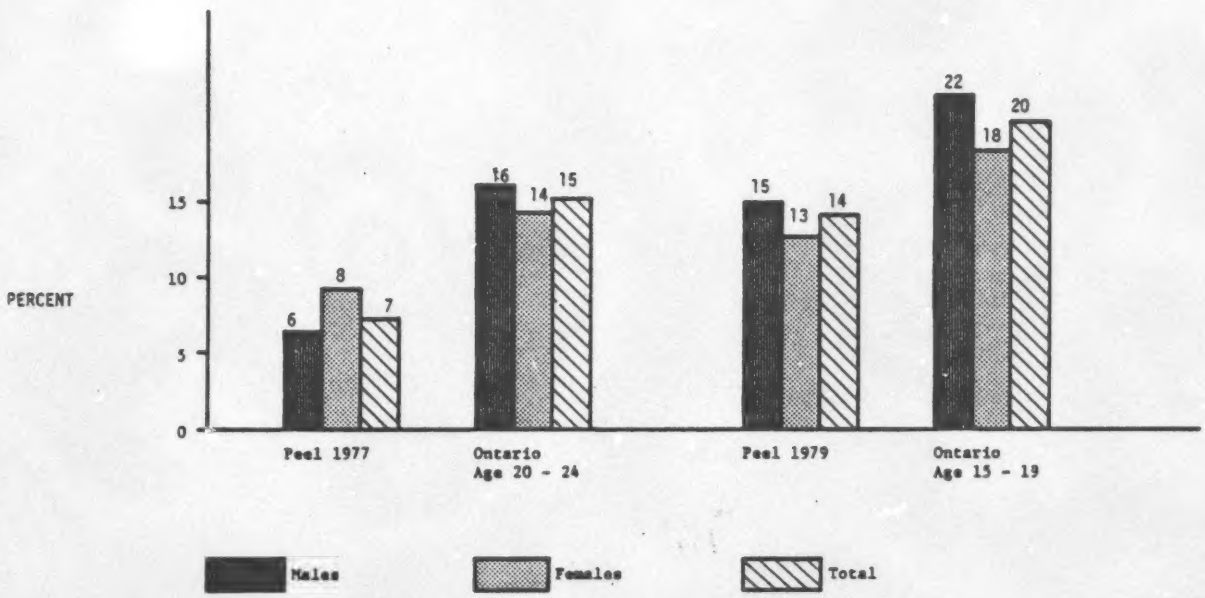
LENGTH OF STAY WITH PRESENT EMPLOYER

	0-6 Months	7-12 Months	1-2 Years	More Than 2 Years
1977-78 (N=264)	29%	26%	22%	23%
1979-80 (N=215)	53%	30%	11%	6%

Unemployment

Unemployment rates for the two groups are derived by taking the number of unemployed as a percentage of all respondents in the labour force. Figure 4 compares these unemployment rates with other data on unemployment among young people in Ontario.

FIGURE 4
UNEMPLOYMENT RATES



The respondents in both cohorts have unemployment rates well below the Ontario rate for their age groups. However, it should be kept in mind that the Toronto region, which includes Peel, generally has a lower unemployment rate than Ontario as a whole.

Job Training

Only a small proportion of students (5%, or 29 in 1977 and 3%, or 15 in 1979) report involvement in a formal job training program such as an apprenticeship. These students are overwhelmingly male (86% in 1977 and 73% in 1979). Moreover, many of those in such programs (48% in 1977, and 33% in 1979) expected in grade 11 to be doing something else, or had no definite plans.

TABLE 3

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES OF RESPONDENTS

	High School	College	University	Other	TOTAL
1977-78 % of Students (N=224)	1%	36%	62%	1%	100%
% of Respondents (N=549)	.5%	15%	25%	.5%	41%
1979-80 % of Students (N=283)	80%	16%	3%	1%	100%
% of Respondents (N=523)	42%	10%	1%	1%	54%

The Government of Ontario estimates (Ontario Statistics, 1981) that 14% of the appropriate age groups attends University and 11% attend some other form of post-secondary institution. These figures are very similar to those obtained by averaging the results for both Peel cohorts. The proportions of Peel students going on to various post-secondary institutions are similar to those in the Province as a whole. However, the pattern of post-secondary attendance differs considerably for colleges and universities.

Respondents from the 1979 cohort who completed grade 12 and went directly to college would at the time of the interview have been in their first year of college. But fewer than 50 students (10% of the total cohort) are in a first year college program. Had respondents in the 1977 cohort gone directly from grade 12 to college, they would be in their third year, or would have completed a two-year program. But Table 4 shows that only 10% (N=8) of the college students from the 1977 group are in year three, whereas 37% (N=29) are in their first year and 53% (N=42) in their second year. More 1977 respondents than 1979 respondents are currently in college (79 vs. 51). This indicates that most college students are either completing grade 13 first, or are taking a year or more off school to work. On the other hand, Table 4 shows that most university students (83%) from the 1977 cohort have gone directly from grade 13 to university, and are in their second year.

TABLE 4

YEAR OF STUDY OF 1977 COHORT ATTENDING POST-SECONDARY

	FIRST YEAR	SECOND YEAR	THIRD YEAR
University (N=132)	14%	83%	3%
College (N=79)	37%	53%	10%

Table 5 provides a further breakdown of the post-secondary institutions being attended by respondents, and Table 6 gives information on the degrees or certificates which they are pursuing.

TABLE 5

POST-SECONDARY INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED

	1977-78		1979-80	
Universities	Number	% Of Students	Number	% Of Students
Erindale/Toronto	35	16	1	-
Waterloo	25	11	0	-
McMaster	16	7	1	-
York	14	6	0	-
Western	14	6	1	-
Guelph	11	5	0	-
Other	23	11	1	-
Total	138	62	4	3
Colleges				
Sheridan	39	18	29	9
Humber	22	10	15	5
Other	19	8	7	2
Total	80	36	51	16

TABLE 6

PROGRAM CHOICES OF POST-SECONDARY STUDENTS

Universities	1977-78 (N=218) Number	% Of Students	1979-80 (N=55) Number	% Of Students
B.A.	61	28	1	-
B.Sc.	38	18	2	4
Engineering	14	6	0	-
Commerce	10	4	0	-
Other	15	7	1	2
College				
Business	19	9	12	23
Media	10	4	2	4
Secretarial	2	1	9	16
Other	49	23	28	50
Total	218	100	55	100

Expectations And Reality

A major focus of the study was to compare respondents' current activity with their high school intentions. Effective programming, career counselling and preparation in school rests on students having some reasonable sense of what they might do after high school. All respondents were asked whether their current activity was what they had expected to be doing while in grade 11. Responses are shown in Table 7.

TABLE 7

ACTUAL AND EXPECTED ACTIVITIES

Current/Expected	Same Job or Course	Other Job	Other Course	Did Not Know
1977				
Work (N=291)	28%	23%	12%	37%
School (N=224)	54%	12%	16%	18%
University Students (N=137)	61%	8%	15%	16%
Total Cohort (N=527)	40%	17%	15%	28%
1979				
Work (N=202%)	29%	29%	18%	24%
School (N=283)	81%	6%	4%	9%
Post-Secondary Students (N=59)	58%	12%	8%	23%
Total Cohort (N=509)	58%	17%	10%	15%

Those in post-secondary institutions are twice as likely as those working to be fulfilling their grade 11 plans. However, even many continuing students find themselves doing something completely unanticipated as little as two years previously (for the 1979 cohort). In other words, students intentions are very frequently not borne out in practice.

From these data it is possible to infer the grade 11 intentions of all students. These are shown in Table 8

TABLE 8

GRADE 11 INTENTIONS AND CURRENT ACTIVITY

	1977 (N=516)	1979 (N=501)
Intended to work	161 (31%)	137 (27%)
Working	134 (83%)	108 (80%)
Working at intended job	74 (46%)	52 (38%)
At school	26 (16%)	13 (10%)
Unemployed	1 (1%)	11 (8%)
Other	0 -	2 (2%)
Intended School	193 (37%)	277 (55%)
At school	155 (80%)	240 (87%)
Intended course	120 (62%)	231 (83%)
Working	36 (19%)	34 (12%)
Unemployed	2 (1%)	2 (1%)
Other	0 -	1 -
Intended Job Training	17 (3%)	14 (3%)
Job training	14 (82%)	10 (71%)
Working	3 (18%)	3 (22%)
At school	0 -	1 (7%)
Unemployed	0 -	0 -
Other	0 -	0 -
Did Not Know	145 (28%)	76 (15%)
Working	99 (68%)	43 (56%)
At school	40 (28%)	26 (34%)
Unemployed	5 (3%)	7 (9%)
Other	1 (1%)	0 -

Of those students who intended to be working, 80% are working, although usually in a different job than they had hoped. Of those who intended to continue their education, 80% are doing so. Again, however, many of these at the post-secondary level are in a different program.

Taken as a whole, the responses indicate that former students' short-term and educational plans (i.e. to finish grade 13, or to enter a particular post-secondary program) are carried out reasonably often. Hcwever, plans related to work are carried out only in a minority of cases.

Comparison of the planned and actual jobs of respondents show that changes of plan are usually from a planned skilled or higher status job to an actual low skill, low status job. For example:

TABLE 9

INTENDED AND ACTUAL JOBS

1977 Cohort Intended	Actual	1979 Cohort Intended	Actual
Chef	Lathe Operator	Radio/TV	Shipper/Reciever
Social Worker	Travel Agent	Pilot	Material Handler
College Student	Truck Driver	Fashion Designer	Dry Cleaning Clerk
Pilot	Civil Technology	Travel Agent	Clerk
Veterinarian	Cake Decorator	Teacher	Retail Sales
Fashion Merchandising	Assembly Inspector	Tool and Dye Maker	Truck Driver
Architect	Cook	Accounting	Cashier
Pilot	Letter Carrier	Music Teacher	Secretary
Model	Drug Store Clerk	Funeral Director	Gas Cashier
Artist	Gas Attendant	Police Officer	Insurance Agent
Probation Officer	Accounting Clerk	Golfer	Sales Clerk
Hairdresser	Clerk	Social Worker	Clerk

Vocational Students

Table 10 compares the activity of vocational and other students from each cohort.

TABLE 10

ACTIVITY OF VOCATIONAL AND REGULAR PROGRAM STUDENTS

	1977		1979	
	Vocational	Regular	Vocational	Regular
Total Group	40	508	38	485
In school	4 (10%)	220 (43%)	3 (8%)	280 (58%)
In Labour Force	35 (88%)	282 (56%)	35 (92%)	203 (41%)
Unemployed	7 (20%)	16 (6%)	11 (31%)	22 (11%)
Job Training	2 (6%)	27 (9%)	1 (3%)	14 (7%)

It can be seen that vocational students are more likely to be in the labour force, more likely to be unemployed, and less likely to be in job training.

Moreover, former vocational students are less likely than other students to be doing what they expected in grade 11, as shown in Table 11.

TABLE 11

ACTUAL AND EXPECTED ACTIVITIES, VOCATIONAL AND REGULAR STUDENTS

		Same Activity	Same General Area	Different Field
1977-78	Vocational (N=35)	29%	14%	57%
	Regular (N=492)	41%	14%	45%
1979-80	Vocational (N=31)	42%	6%	52%
	Regular (N=478)	59%	5%	36%

Conclusions and Implications

The major findings of the study are:

- Two years after grade 11 most Peel students are either in grade 13 (43%) or in the labour force (46%). Very few students go from grade 12 directly to college.

- Four years after grade 11 most Peel students are working (58%) or at a university (25%). Most university students (86%) enter directly from grade 13.

- Most of those in the labour force are in entry type positions, and in clerical, sales, service, or production jobs. Reported unemployment rates are below those for the relevant age groups in Ontario.

- Few students are in formal job-training programs.

- Respondents' current activities are frequently not what they expected when in grade 11. This is especially so for those in the labour force, where expectations were frequently higher than reported current status. Many students simply do not have any plans in grade 11 beyond finishing high school.

- Vocational school students are more likely than other students to be working or unemployed and less likely to have fulfilled their grade 11 plans.

Potential Implications

These results are preliminary in that this is only the first round of the study. They are affected as well by the general state of the economy. Later rounds of the study will provide more complete data. However the data in this report would seem to have implications for the following areas:

Program: If it is indeed the case that level 5/grade 13 is the usual path for entry to college as well as university, then both the level 5 and level 4 programs need to be examined with this in mind. At level 4, where most students are going directly into the labour force, it might be desirable to put more emphasis on work-related programs. At level 5 there might need to be some reorientation due to the non-university intentions of many of the students. The changing plans of many students also point to the need for maximum flexibility to accommodate the changing needs and wants of students.

Counselling. The patterns of choice and chance which reveal themselves in the study are of importance to secondary school counsellors in working with students. The degree to which students' plans are likely to change is of particular importance. The relatively minor role of formal job-training program is another issue for examination.

Career Preparation. It is clear that students in grade 11 have, in many cases, either vague or unrealistic plans for their futures. It would not be desirable to discourage students from aiming high; nor would it be wise to insist that all students formulate career plans, as for many of them such an expectation would probably be unrealistic. Rather, the study does point to the importance of exposing students to a variety of possibilities in terms of urging to keep various options open.

Further Action

The next round of the study will occur in 1983-84, with a report in the fall of 1984. Meanwhile, the results of the study will be widely circulated, and discussion will occur regarding the implications of the data for Peel. The Superintendent of Program will monitor responses to the report to ensure that any appropriate recommendations are brought forward.

Ref.No.1577D/111D

THE PEEL SECONDARY FOLLOW-UP STUDY

A DISCUSSION PAPER

This paper is an attempt to sort out some of the major implications of the results of the Peel Secondary Follow-Up Study. Its purpose is to promote discussion of the study's findings and their meaning both within Peel and elsewhere. Accordingly, the paper is the opinion of the author, and does not necessarily reflect the views of other Peel staff or the Board as a whole.

The official report of the study is attached to this document, and includes a presentation both of the study method and its results. Accordingly, this paper will not restate the results, but will use them as the basis for a more wide-ranging discussion.

The most important single implication of the study is the variable nature of people's lives. Plans change, expectations are not fulfilled, new circumstances arise, and people adjust. This is a view strongly supported by other research as well. It is simply impossible to foresee the innumerable ways in which the world will act on us - or we on it.

For the schools, such a view suggests a shift away from attempting to shape or determine students' lives in the direction of making change and adjustment easier. Specific job training is unlikely to be useful to many students, but some basic skills applicable in many settings might. More streaming will not help, but easier movement between levels or easier re-entry for upgrading would. Career choices in grade 11 are unrealistic, but better information about the structure of the labour force is not.

The task of education, then, is to help students deal with the inevitable uncertainties and changes most of them will face after leaving secondary school. The accomplishment of this task may, however, require changes in a variety of school practices. Several of these are suggested in more detail below.

1. School programs. At present level 5/grade 13 is the primary route to post-secondary education, while level 4/grade 12 leads almost entirely to entry into the labour force. The proposed changes in the secondary school system may alter this situation somewhat. Nonetheless, a large proportion of students will continue to go directly into the labour force after leaving high school, and many more will be in the labour force within two or three years of leaving high school. The question that arises is the kind of school program which is appropriate for these students.

   The student results make it clear that specific job-training is not likely to be the answer. However the results also suggest that more attention to work-related areas would be appropriate. Such programs as work experience and co-operative education come to mind as ways in which students' knowledge about the world of work could be increased. General skills, which could be applied in a variety of work settings, would also be likely to be useful. Finally, there would appear to be room for increased emphasis in all curricula on skills and knowledge which would be related to work.

   This is not a call for a shift to a curriculum which has preparation for work as its only goal; such a shift would not serve students well. However a change in emphasis within existing programs does seem to be worth considering.

2. Counselling. The many changes in students' plans, and the extent to which their high school expectations have not been met, would seem to suggest weaknesses in counselling services for students. However this is not necessarily the case. It would be more fruitful to assume that changes of plans by students are always going to occur, and represent useful adaptions to changing circumstances. It is neither reasonable nor desirable to expect the schools to provide students with firm and fixed plans.

On the other hand, students do seem to have limited information about such things as the structure of the labour force and the kinds of jobs which might actually be available.

There are, then, two roles at least which counsellors would play in assisting students. One would be to emphasize that plans need to be kept flexible, and options are important, because of unanticipated changes which will occur. Students need to be advised to plan for the unexpected, as it were, while continuing to see career goals as longer term objectives. A second task would be to attempt to make students more familiar with the actual composition of the labour force, the kinds of entry level jobs which exist, and the realistic possibilities of pursuing various careers. This is not to suggest that students be discouraged from aiming high, but only that they understand how easy or difficult to achieve their goal may be.

3. Continuing education. As the Follow-Up Study continues we will learn more about students' needs for continuing education. However the available data, together with other information now available, suggest that education upgrading is likely to become more and more important. Although this issue is currently under discussion in Peel, it may be worthwhile to consider ways in which a return to secondary school would be facilitated for adults.

4. Post-secondary entry. As noted, grade 13 is becoming the standard entry route for college as well as university, a shift which has considerable implications. Not only do students in level 4 need to take this fact into account, but the abilities of the total grade 13 population may be changing as more students take the fifth year.

   The five year college entry issue is a difficult one, as the colleges were intended to serve grade 12 graduates. The colleges need to be involved in discussions with the schools about entry requirements for various programs.

5. Job training. On-the-job training is taken by only a small proportion of students. Further, more students are in such programs 4 years after grade 11 than 2 years after, suggesting that training is sought after some initial experience in the labour force. Whether the lack of job training is a result of limited opportunity, student ignorance, or student choice, is unknown. However, if programs such as Linkage are to succeed, this situation will have to change dramatically. Again, students need to be given realistic information about the prospects for job-training after entering employment, and especially for apprenticeship.

6. Vocational schools. The vocational school outcomes, at least in terms of unemployment rates, are disappointing. We need more information about what happens to students after they leave vocational schools, especially in terms of their opportunities for further training and their ability to maintain a job for a long period of time.

Conclusion

Many of the issues raised in this report are relevant to the Ministry's plans for changes in secondary education in Ontario. It is the purpose of the Secondary Follow-Up Study to promote discussion which will help Peel respond in a way which addresses the needs of its students to the greatest extent possible.

B. Levin
Chief Research Officer